

## Child Soldier Quotes

*“My dreams take me back to the killings, being awake is no better”*

**Selected quotes from child solidiers**

An AK-47 gives you so much power... With this thing I  
can shoot an elephant down. With this thing I'm equal as  
an adult, I can make an adult scream and beg for mercy.

When you have an AK-47 you will not go hungry, you eat anywhere you pass, any village that you go to - you just sit under the tree and people will bring you food. That's the power it had. When you don't have it you become like a child again, you become vulnerable.

There's something exciting about going to war, I don't know, when you win the battle you want to win another one and you want to win another one...

.... they were snatching babies and infants from their mother's arms and tossing them in the air. The babies would free-fall to their deaths. At other times they would also chop them from the back of their heads to kill them, you know, like you do when you slaughter chickens....

One girl with us tried to escape. They made her take off her slippers and give them to me and then killed her.....one time we came across two pregnant women. They tied the woman down with their legs eagle spread and took a sharpened stick and jabbed them inside their wombs until the babies came out on the stick."



The nights are the worst. Sometimes I am too afraid to sleep. For when I sleep, I am dead....I see someone take a gun and then they shoot me---not just once but three times...Is that called a dream or a nightmare?

I started fighting at the age of six. I decided to turn in my gun because I want to go back to school.

Most times I dream, I have a gun, I´m firing, I´m killing,  
cutting, amputating. I feel afraid, thinking perhaps that  
these things will happen to me again. Sometimes I cry...  
When I see a woman I´m afraid of her. I´ve been bad with  
women; now I fear that if I go near one she´ll hit me.  
Perhaps she will kill me.

Each house had been told to hand over one child. The LTTE had already issued the order, but the parents had ignored it. First, they sent letters, then they started to visit homes. They came to my house and said, "You know about our announcement". Each house has to turn over one child. If you don't agree, we will take a child anyway."

I had a friend who joined the movement. I thought that my life was meaningless because I had not parents to look after me. I went along with [my friend] because I thought what the heck my life is meaningless anyway.

I didn't know what we were fighting for, I didn't know what freedom is, but all I knew was I wanted to revenge my family...my village has been burned down and that's what I have to revenge. I have to find out where my brothers and sister are.

Sometimes, when I was angry, I'd kill some of my fellow rebels. If we fell into an ambush and these bigger boys made a mistake, we'd kill them.

So I grew up in a place where people used to die all the time... There are no happy memories — everything was just violence, trauma, war. That's what I remember...



Later I heard my mother died but I didn't understand how she died. I was about six or seven. My father was never with us because he was fighting for the SPLA [Sudan People's Liberation Army].

I've closed my eyes in many places and I never fired  
running like the way adults would do, 'cause it's too  
strong...

... and since then a seed was planted in my heart of hating a certain race. And that seed when I was trained as a kid I said I want to kill as many Muslims and as many Arabs as possible.

The level of starvation that we went through changed my senses, and I look at my fellow neighbor or my fellow comrade, they smell like food, I want to eat them, my saliva would drop, that I want to eat somebody raw without cooking them. And that was one of the lowest forms that I've been in my life....

...I had made a prayer and then a crow came, that crow  
became the bridge between me and eating my friend. So I  
didn't eat my friend 'cause I ate that crow.

I knew everything about my rifle-how to take it down,  
clean it, assemble it, load it, really fast! ... I was the fastest  
in my company...The commander had me train new  
soldiers. I liked the training...they looked up to me, and i  
taught them how to be good with the gun.

My second brother had gone to the fields to get cassava with a friend when the attack started. He got shot in the foot...Then later he got a sickness in the chest and he died...

... My other sister died when we went to the river to wash our mother blankets. We were attacked...I saw my sister fall dead. I went to tell my mother with my little brother on my back...



...my other sister died when she got sick and her stomach and legs got swollen. My little brother also died from sickness because my mother no longer had milk in her breasts...Five more people died while we retreated. One aunt and four men...We traveled with other people. But the other people did not want to be with us because my little brother made noise and he cried...

... before, when we had been with the soldiers, when a child cried, they have the mother a knife to stick in the child's head because the child was making noise and we could all be caught. If the mother did not want to do it, they killed her and her child...

... I saw a lady, they took the baby from her back, put the baby in a mortar and they hammered the baby to death and the mother could not even cry because otherwise she would also be killed. UNITA's main order was to kill, always kill, they never pardoned anybody.

I was fast asleep when they came to get me at one in the morning...These people dragged me out of the house. My father shouted at them, saying, "What is going on?" but some of the LTTE soldiers took my father away towards the woods and beat him...

Early on when my brothers and I were captured, the LRS explained to us that all five brothers couldn't serve in the LRA because we would not perform well. So they tied up my two younger brothers and invited us to watch. Then they beat them sticks until two of them died. They told us it would give us strength to fight. My youngest brother was nine years old.

I had a friend who joined the movement New People's Army. I thought that my life was meaningless because I had not parents to look after me. I went along with my friend because I thought what the heck my life is meaningless anyway...

I was selling bread at the market, trying to make some money to have something to eat and survive. A policeman came up to me, threw all my bread in the water and said I should go away. I was later beaten for that. When the fighters came to our area, I joined with them.

I'm proud of what I learned- how to speak to groups,  
organize people, command, use weapons. I never got this  
from [the] government. How else am I supposed to have a  
future? If I had it to do again, I'd join again.



The rebels attacked my village- all the huts were burned and many people were killed. The RUF rounded up those who lived. Then they took some young boys to go with them. They said they would kill us if we did not go. They gave me a rifle and told me to kill this woman... She was my relative [aunt] and I didn't want to hurt her. They told me to shoot her or I would be shot. So I shot her...I did it so survive...

... the boy tried to escape and was caught, tied up, and marched back to camp... All the recruits from the various companies were told that we were never going home, that we were fighting now with the LRA so as a symbol of our pledge to fight on, this boy would be killed and we would help. Soldiers then laid the boy on the ground and stabbed him three times with a bayonet until the blood began seeping from the wounds. Then the new recruits approached the boy and beat him on the chest. Each one had a turn and could only stop once the blood from the body splashed up on to you. This boy was sixteen years old.

As we continued on the endless marches, I got bad blisters on my bare feet. Thorns embedded in the bottom of my feet became infected. Eventually, I could not longer keep up and the commander who had initially abducted me told me I was useless as I could not walk. He turned away and then two soldiers, in full uniform, approached and started beating me with the heavy ends of their RPG's (rocket propelled grenades). I was repeatedly beaten on the head and body and left for dead. Two days later, a local farmer found me.

Escapees who were found were generally killed. They were tied to a post and all the troops would be called to watch. They were killed, and the killer had sometimes to drink the victim's blood. The blood was said to be good for the person not to feel remorse.

The organization has tough discipline. There are great commanders, but there are others who love to kill. Those guys are real assassins. If one of them catches you asleep on guard duty, he'll cut your throat there and then so that you never wake up.

I had a friend, Juanita, who got into trouble for sleeping around, We had been friends in civilian life and we shared a tent together. The commander said that it didn't matter that she was my best friend. She had committed an error and had to be killed. I closed my eyes and fired the gun, but i didn't hit her. So i shot again. The grave was right nearby. I had to bury her and put dirt on top of her. The commander said "You did very well. Even though you started to cry, you did well. You'll have to do this again many more times, and you'll have to learn not to cry."

My training was four-and-a-half months. I learned how to use a compass, how to attack a police post, how to carry out an ambush, and the handling of weapons. By the end I was using an AK-47, a Galil, an R-15, mortars, pineapple grenades, M-26 grenades, and tatucos (multiple grenade launchers).

They bring the people they catch, guerrillas and robbers, to the training course. My squad had to kill three people. After the first one was killed, the commander told me that the next day I'd have to do the killing. I was stunned and appalled. I had to do it in front of the whole company, fifty people. I had to shoot him in the head. I was trembling. Afterwards, I couldn't eat. I'd see the person's blood. For weeks, I had a hard time sleeping... Some of the victims cried and screamed. The commander told us we had to learn how to kill.



One boy from the government side was caught near the Broadville Bridge; he had been wounded in the leg and unable to retreat. LURD caught him and tied him up attached to a stick. They then cut off his toes, fingers, nose and ears. Then they cut off his private parts and left him to bleed to death. They later threw his body in the river.

They captured me on my father's farm and took me away. I was forced to leave this area. They gave me a gun and forced me to go and loot. Also I was forced to carry all the loot, and if I refused I would be flogged or shot. We had food only sometimes...The leader told us to beat women and saw it with his eyes. Also the leader told us to have sex with women older than your mother. I told them "no" and was flogged and made to do hard work.

Seven weeks after I arrived there was combat. I was very scared. It was an attack on the paramilitaries. We killed about seven of them. They killed one of us. We had to drink their blood to conquer our fear. Only the scared ones had to do it. I was the most scared of all, because I was the newest and youngest.

We smoke grass, cigarettes, dugee (tablets), cokis (mashed tablets in a powder). It all makes you brave to go on the front. The commanders give it out. When you take the tablets you can't sleep, it makes you hot in your body. Anytime you go on the frontline, they give it to you. Just go to do something to be strong because you don't want the feeling of killing someone. You need the drugs to give you the strength to kill.

It feels great to kill your enemy. The MILF does not initiate attacks. If the military didn't attack us, there will be no trouble. They are the ones who are really at fault. They deserve to be killed. The other children they are happy too. They are not sad. I really do not regret killing. If they are your enemies, you can kill them. But if they are not your enemies, you shouldn't kill them.

I was not afraid, when I killed LURD soldiers, I would  
laugh at them, this is how I got my nickname, "Laughing  
and killing."

There were abducted Sudanese within the LRA the entire time I was with the LRA in Sudan... We would abduct the Dinkas and Lukoya children, make them carry heavy loads, sometimes kill them. We'd take young girl...as young as eight...they were used for fighting, most were killed in battle, they would be put in front.

Three children with swollen legs had difficulty walking and tried to stop. The LRA tied the children's hands behind their backs and ordered the others to beat them to death with sticks as big as my arm. Later they removed the clothing from the children and threw their bodies into a swamp.



One day, rebels attacked the village where I lived. I hid and watched as they killed my relatives and raped my mother and sisters. I thought if I joined their army, I would be safe.

When the rebels came, I was small; they forced me to go with them. I got pregnant from the fighters. When the time came for birth, the baby died. Four or five of the boys pushed on my stomach to force me to get rid of the baby, my stomach is now broken.

I heard them cut the men's throats...and the screams...I saw them kill innocent babies. I can't sleep after what I've seen. I'm too edgy and my dreams take me back to the killing. Being awake is no better. I hear things and suddenly it's like the horrible things are happening all over again...I can't think, and many things remind me. My mind is out of control. I must be losing my mind.

They give you a gun and you have to kill the best friend  
you have, they do it to see if they can trust you. If you  
don't kill him, your friend will be ordered to kill you. I  
had to do it because otherwise I would have been killed.  
That's why I got out. I couldn't stand it any longer.

They captured me and three other boys and took us to their place. I thought they would kill me since that's what the LRA told us would happen. But they treated us well and took us to a rehabilitation center in Gulu.

...I went to school for some days but do not go there now.  
The children, they called me "rebel"...My teacher could  
not understand and wanted me to obey him. How could I  
obey him? He has not been in combat and does not know  
what it is to be a commander and decide for life and  
death...

When I came out of the bush, I had nothing-no shoes, no shirt, nothing. I could not come into the village this way. People would laugh at me and make fun of me for being so poor. In this situation, I would be nothing, not a person. I had to have a means of living and helping my family.

He smoked a lot of weed, took drugs, and did crazy things.  
The thing he liked to do most was kneel on people and use  
a razor blade to carve the letters "RUF" on their chests. No  
one ordered him to do these things...he can never return to  
his village.



When the child soldier returns home, he tells his story to his family. In Sierra Leone, children tell their parents everything...The parents then go to the chief and ask him to talk with the boy. If the chief agrees, the boy lies face down on the ground and holds the chief's ankle. In this position, he tells everything he did during the war. If the chief believes him and thinks he can come back, he can tell the boy to do a job that helps the village. He may tell the boy to talk with a particular man who is like a guide and support.

The rebels told me to join them, but I said no. Then they  
killed my smaller brother. I changed my mind.

I mean when you arrive at the camp, the first things they do is kill a guy, and if you are a recruit they call you over to prick at him, to chop off his hands and arms.

For me to overcome that fear. I had to kill someone at the training camp. They brought someone to me one night when I was on duty guarding on entrance. It was a child, whose face they'd covered, and they told me he was a rebel, an enemy, and I had to kill him. That's exactly what I did. On the spot. With my knife. That night, after doing that, I couldn't sleep.

We prefer to recruit children at the age of eleven or twelve.

They picked me and took me away in the bush where I was forced to become a "wife" to one of the rebels. Being new in the field, on the first night I refused, but on the second night, they said "Either you give in or death." I still tried to refuse, and then the man got serious and knifed me on the head. I became helpless and started bleeding terribly and that was how I got involved in sex at the age of 14 because death was near.

I was abducted during” Operation Pay Yourself,” in 1998.

I was 9 years old. Six rebels came through our yard. They went to loot for food. It’s called ”jaja” ----”get food”.

”They said”, ”We want to bring a small boy like you----we like you.” My mother didn’t comment, she just cried. My father objected. They threatened to kill him. They argued with him at the back of the house. I heard a gunshot. One of them told me, ”Let’s go, they’ve killed your father.” A woman rebel grabbed my hand roughly and took me along. I saw my father lying dead as we passed.

---they killed my parents in front of me, my uncle's hands were cut off and my sister was raped in front of us by their commander called " Spare No Soul." After all this happened, they told us, the younger boys, to join them. If not, they were going to kill us. I was in place to die with my parents because I felt like killing them myself----but they had something which i did not: a gun. I and my sister were left in a traumatized state. We had not parents any longer, and my sister was in pain after having been raped, and my own toe was cut off.



The day my mother and father and brother were killed, the enemy came by surprise. They attacked the village, they gathered all the houses, even all our clothes were burned inside the houses. We remained naked, without food, and we were suffering, from hunger even. Nakedness was also a problem. Then I decided what to do. I thought I'd better join the army.

When I was fighting, I enjoyed it---killing and destroying.  
I killed human being, many; young, old, anyone. The first  
one, an old lady. I shot from far away. I was very angry,  
so I shot her. Their families killed my people.

It's like magic. I killed people and it doesn't stick to me. I  
still go to heaven...

I don't want to go back to my village because I burnt all the houses there. I don't know what the people would do, but they'd harm me. I don't think I'll ever be accepted in my village.

It's easier the second time. You become indifferent.

I don't know why I killed these people. I killed them at a distance and at close range. I killed many. We didn't kill civilian if we were attacking a village and there were no enemies. The people we sent on reconnaissance would tell us who the enemy was. If there were enemies, we'd kill civilians. We had to kill our brothers too. If one of us committed a crime, our commander would tell us to beat him to death. One time, I had to beat and kill one of the other rebels. During an ambush, he'd fired when he wasn't supposed to, and we were discovered. I started beating him, but i didn't have the strength. So an older rebel beat him to death.

We smoked jambaa (marijuana) all the time. They told us it would ward off disease in the bush. Before a battle, they would make a shallow cut here [on the temple, beside his right eye] and put powder in, and cover it with a plaster. Afterward I did not see anything having any value. I didn't see any human being having any value. I felt light.

... I don't know how many people I killed, because I was just shooting. I couldn't see anything. They just told me to shoot.



Children make the best and bravest...Don't overlook them.  
They can fight more than we people. It is hard for them to  
just retreat.

One boy tried to escape, but he was caught. His hands were tied, and then they made us, the other new captives, kill him with a stick. I felt sick. I knew this boy from before. We were from the same village. I refused to kill him and they told me they would shoot me. They pointed a gun at me, so I had to do it. The boy was asking me, "Why are you doing this?" I said I had no choice. After we killed him, they made us smear his blood on our arms. I felt dizzy. I felt so sick. They said we had to do this so we would not fear death and so we would not try to escape.

I don't know what I was fighting for. The rebels just told us that we were fighting for the people. I don't know what the war was all about because at the time. I was not really old enough to understand these things.

I was forced to do amputations. We had a cutlass, an ax and a biglog. We called the villagers out and let them stand in line. You ask [the victims] whether they want a long hand or a short hand [the amputation at the wrist or elbow]. The long hand you put in a different bag from the short hand. If you have a large number of amputated hands in the bag, the promotion will be automatic, to various ranks.

So, on our way to be killed, we were taken to a house with about 200 people held in it. My older cousin was sent to go and select 25 men and 25 women to have their hands chopped off. Then she was told to cut off the first man's hand. She refused to do it saying that she was afraid, I was then told to do it. I said I'd never done such a thing before and that I was also afraid. We were told to sit on the side and watch. So we sat. They chopped off two men's hands. My cousin couldn't watch and bowed her head down to avoid the sight. Because she did that, they shot her in the foot. They bandaged her foot and then forced her to walk. We left the two men whose hands had been cut off behind.

We were taken to a mosque in Kissy [Sierra Leone]. They killed everyone in there....They were snatching babies and infants from their mother's arms and tossing them in the air. The babies would free-fall to their deaths. At other times they would also chop them from the back of their heads to kill them, you know, like you do when you slaughter chickens....One girl with us tried to escape. They made her take off her slippers and give them to me and then killed her.....one time we came across two pregnant women. They tied the woman down with their legs spread and took a sharpened stick and jabbed them inside their wombs until the babies came out on the stick.

They asked me why my legs were like that and so I told them it was because my mum used to beat me a lot and that's why I was like that and so they said to me why didn't I go with them, because the guerillas didn't beat people, they didn't treat you badly, they didn't insult you, nothing.

A policeman came up to me, threw all my bread in the water and said I should go away. I was later beaten for that. When the fighters came to our area, I joined with them.



In the army I was trained to use a gun and I performed guard duty. I was often beaten and raped by the other soldiers. One day, a commander wanted me to become his wife, so I tried to escape. They caught me, whipped me, and raped me every night for many days.

When I was just 12, I had a baby. I don't even know who his father is. I ran away again but I have nowhere to go and no food for the baby. I am afraid to go home.

I was a virgin. It was painful. After he raped me, he left. I didn't say anything to anyone because he was part of the command...Four days later he came back. He did it by force again. And he did it again nearly two months later. Another commander told me they were going to kill me because I didn't obey them.

When you're with a commander, you don't have to do the hard work. So most of the prettiest girls are with commanders.

The RUF attacked my village and took 28 women. Twenty-four of them were killed outright - they just killed them! I myself was shot. The bullet hit my leg but bounced off - I was protected [by magic]. The soldier named Rambo saved me. He saved me and I became his wife. I didn't want to fight...After training, I looked after the orphans and other girls and boys our group picked up after attacking villages. I was the "Mommy Queen" and cared for them. Nobody else wanted to do this so they all brought children to me. By the end [of the war], I had 130 children with me. I helped some of them find their families again.

...We had food only sometimes...The leader told us to beat women and saw it [watched us] with his eyes. Also the leader told us to have sex with women older than your mother. I told them "no" and was flogged and made to do hard work.

I think I was 8, 9. When I finished training I was, like 9.

I got used to death from when I was born. And even then when I was 12 I think my mind was still like a child, I did not know the importance of life, I didn't know you just die once.



... my mum told me like there's another world that people  
go to, so there's another place you go to. So that death  
wasn't really important...

Lennart Grebelius 2011

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